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DELIVERY OF THE VERIFIED BEEF PRODUCTION PROGRAM IN SASKATCHEWAN

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BDF Project #20040605 Final Report

"DELIVERY OF THE VERIFIED BEEF PRODUCTION PROGRAM IN SASKATCHEWAN"

Abstract/Summary

A major issue in the beef industry today is assuring the quality of the product we put before the consumer. The Quality Starts Here program was initiated in 1994 by the Canadian Cattlemen's Association to increase awareness of food safety and quality issues within the beef industry and to provide beef producers with management tools to address these issues. The addition of the Verified Beef Production program in 2003 provided a national voluntary, verifiable on-farm beef safety program incorporating the good management practices of the Quality Starts Here program with the principles of HACCP, an internationally recognized system of food safety management.

No other country has in place a beef safety system national in scope as this program is. Since Saskatchewan has the second largest cow-herd in Canada it is critical that we have significant uptake of this program. The task for the beef industry is daunting as we have a large number of producers who are more difficult to identify and reach (dairy and poultry are supply-managed and producers easily identified and there has been a significant consolidation within the pork industry in the last few years greatly reducing the number of pork producers. Each of these commodities have their own HACCP-based food safety program.). Feedlot operations tend to respond more quickly to market signals from processors. However, Saskatchewan does not have a large feeding industry; most of our 22,000 producers are cow/calf operations. These operations are very diverse, present a greater challenge to program delivery and we expect that it will take several years to have a significant number of them attend a workshop and enroll on the VBP program.

The objective of this project was to maintain the momentum already gained within the delivery of the Verified Beef Production program in Saskatchewan, a voluntary verifiable on-farm food safety certification program for beef producers.

From April 1, 2005-March 31, 2006 we held 41 workshops and had a total of 309 producers from 217 production units attend workshops. We continue to get most of our interest from the cow-calf sector; we need to target greater participation from the fledgling feedlot industry in this province. Since we began delivering workshops in 2003 we have had over 700 producers from 487 production units attend workshops. Often more than one person attends from each farm as usually more than one person is responsible for animal care and management on an operation.

As of March 31/06 we have 20 production units that have undergone their initial on-farm audit and are fully registered on the VBP Program. We have four additional production units undergoing their initial registration audit process in April, 2006. The last national report indicates that we compare favourably in numbers of producers trained as well as the numbers who have undergone a registration audit (BC has 319 persons trained, 1 audit; Manitoba has 149 persons trained and no audits, AB has 1300 trained and 17 audited, Ontario has 800 trained and 94 audited). We rank second behind Ontario in numbers of operations that have been audited and registered.

With the partial re-opening of the US border our industry has become revitalized. Producers have learned that they must use all available tools to market animals in today's marketplace. Many are using tools such as the Verified Beef Production program and Environmental Farm Plan to improve management practices and accountability for their operations. Prairie Heritage Beef, a program headquartered in Alberta, but with producers in Saskatchewan, is requiring that producers be audited and fully registered on the VBP program as a result of marketing activities that they are pursuing. We expect to see Natural Valley Farms of Wolseley implement this requirement shortly as well. With the advent of BSE we have seen many niche marketers and smaller processing facilities being built in Canada and many producers realize that participating in an on-farm food safety program such as Verified Beef Production improves accountability for their products and opens new markets for Canada's beef.

Introduction

The objective of this project was to maintain the momentum already gained within the delivery of the Verified Beef Production program in Saskatchewan, a voluntary verifiable on-farm food safety certification program for beef producers. Since Saskatchewan has the second largest cow-herd in Canada it is critical that we have significant uptake of this program. Most of our 22,000 beef cattle owners are in the cow/calf sector, but we feel it is also important to have the feedlot industry adopt this program as well.

Methods

We attended trade shows and producer functions throughout the term of this project. These included the FACS (Farm Animal Council of Saskatchewan) Stockperson's School and the Saskatchewan Stock Growers Association convention in May, Western Beef Development Centre Field-day in June, Pasture Field-day at Wroxton in July, Western Feedlot School in August, Growing the Livestock Industry in October, Agribition in November, Western Grazing Conference in December, Saskatchewan Cattle Feeders Association convention in January and Saskatchewan Meat Processors Association convention in February. We also ran radio advertisements and regular articles in livestock and veterinary publications.

We provided presentations to students in Vocational Agriculture, College of Agriculture, Western College of Veterinary Medicine, and Beef Production Program at SIAST-Wascana during the academic year as well as giving a presentation at the Growing the Livestock Industry conference in Saskatoon.

We continue to train and update our speakers' bureau and auditors on changes within the program. We now have three auditors who are fully qualified to operate on their own (have completed their shadow audits). We have 12 other persons who have taken the auditor training; the Provincial Coordinator and Program Administrator do not conduct audits and most of the remaining 10 persons have completed at least one shadow audit (program requirements are 3-5 shadow audits depending on prior experience).

We also have available AIMS speakers who give a short introductory talk to groups wanting to learn what the VBP program can offer them. These are usually given to 4-H clubs, producer clubs and as part of producer field-days.

Our workshop is given by the Provincial Coordinator and is a 3-4 hour presentation reviewing the Producer Manual and program requirements in detail as they pertain to each individual operation. These are done in small groups of 8-12 producers so all producers' questions can be addressed.

Results

From April 1, 2005-March 31, 2006 we held 41 workshops and had a total of 309 producers from 217 production units attend workshops. We continue to get most of our interest from the cow-calf sector; we still need to target greater participation from the fledgling feedlot industry in this province.

Since we began delivering workshops in 2003 we have had over 700 producers from 487 production units attend workshops. Often more than one person attends from each farm as usually more than one person is responsible for animal care and management on an operation.

As of March 31, 2006 we have 20 production units that have undergone an audit and are fully registered on the VBP Program with an additional four production units that are undergoing their initial registration audit process in April, 2006.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Provincially, we are part of a multi-commodity group which continues to look at the feasibility of a multi-commodity delivery model as well as sharing of information between commodities. Ultimately, a multi-commodity delivery and auditing agency would be most economically viable; however, there are many challenges as each commodity is at a different point

in its development and it will be several years before all programs are at a point where they can amalgamate their delivery and auditing services.

Our program still faces challenges to have a larger proportion of beef producers adopt this program. Beef producers have learned from the border closure due to BSE that we must have enhanced marketing tools in order to sell our product. We have niche marketers who are adopting the Verified Beef Production program as part of their marketing strategy which is moving forward quickly with the partial re-opening of borders in late 2005. We are now beginning to have the marketplace drive this program, which is necessary to further the adoption of VBP. We have 10 years invested in this program and are just now seeing significant uptake by both producers and the marketplace. As markets continue to adopt use of the VBP program as an integral part of their marketing system we will gain an on-farm food safety system that will continue to serve our producers and ultimately our customers well.

Acknowledgements

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